

SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA

the *Dialogo* in the history of Italian literature has never been fully realized. In a language which is singularly poor in mystical works (though so rich in almost every other field of thought), it stands with the *Divina Commedia* as one of the two supreme attempts to express the eternal in the symbolism of a day, to paint the union of the soul with the suprasensible while still imprisoned in the flesh. The whole of Catherine's life is the realization of the end of Dante's poem : " to remove those living in this life from the state of misery, and to lead them to the state of felicity "; and the mysticism of Catherine's book is as practical and altruistic as that of Dante's, when he declares to Can Grande that the whole *Commedia* " was undertaken not for speculation, but for work. For albeit in some parts or passages it is treated in speculative fashion, this is not for the sake of speculation, but for the sake of work."^x Thus Catherine, in the preliminary chapters of the *Diakgo*, " wishing more virilely to know and follow the truth," makes her first petition to the eternal Father for herself, only because ^{ct} the soul cannot perform any true service to her neighbour by teaching, example, or prayer, unless she first serves herself by acquiring and possessing virtue." By the infinite desire that proceeds from love, the soul can make reparation to God for her neighbour's sins, as well as for her own. Even as charity gives life to all the virtues, so all the vices have their root in self-love, and both are realized in action by means of others. " There can be no perfect virtue, none that bears fruit, unless it be exercised by means of our neighbour." ²

For virtue to be perfect, it must be exercised with discretion, " which discretion is nought else than a true knowledge that the soul should have of herself and of Me, and in this knowledge it has its root." Discretion, which springs from charity and is nurtured in the soil of humility, should be the lamp of the whole spiritual life, directing all the powers of the soul to serve God and to love her neighbour, offering up the life of the body for the salvation of his soul, and her temporal substance for th«

¹ *Epist.* X. 16.

³ *Diakgo* cap. i-cap. 8, cap. n. Cf. Letters 311 (203), 282 (39).